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## Key Messages

What motivates people to pay attention to the road while driving? What information helps drivers understand why engaging in other activities, especially texting or talking on their cell phone does not allow them to pay full attention to the road? After looking closely at this problem, the following statements best summarize the critical messages that work to move people to action.

No matter what State you live in, these persuasive messages most often will be the same. These key messages can help guide your communications as you create State and local programs that build awareness and change behavior.

Distraction is defined by NHTSA as a specific type of inattention that occurs when drivers divert their attention away from the task of driving to focus on another activity instead. These distractions can be electronic distractions, such as navigation systems and cell phones, or more conventional distractions, such as interacting with passengers and eating. These distracting tasks can affect drivers in different ways and are categorized into the following three types– visual, taking your eyes off the road; manual, taking your hands off the wheel; and cognitive, taking your mind off the road.

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### IT'S TIME TO "PUT IT DOWN"

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#### **Drivers Simply Can't Do Two Things At Once**

- Drivers who use hand-held devices while driving are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves or others.
- The proportion of drivers reportedly distracted at the time of the fatal crashes has increased from 8 percent in 2004 to 11 percent in 2008.
- One of the most commonly recognized distractions is cell phone use. Cell phone subscriptions have grown exponentially from 1988 through 2009. About 89 percent, or approximately 277 million of all Americans, have a cell phone, according to CTIA – The Wireless Association. For many, it is the only kind of telephone they possess. In

a recent NHTSA survey, most individuals (77 percent) reported that they talk on the phone while driving at least some of the time.

#### **Everyone Has A Personal Responsibility**

With more portable technology now than ever, driver distractions have risen to unprecedented numbers. We live in a world where people expect instant, real-time information 24 hours-a-day and those desires do not stop just because people get behind the wheel. Drivers simply do not realize the dangers that are posed when they take their eyes and minds off the road and their hands off the wheel and focus on activities other than driving.

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Common sense and personal responsibility are a major part of the solution. We simply can't legislate our way out of this problem. It's up to each and every person to make sure they "Put It Down" and pay attention to road. The risks are simply too high!

### **Young Drivers Are Especially At Risk**

Younger, inexperienced drivers under 20 years old have the highest proportion of distraction-related fatal crashes. Their lack of driving experience can contribute to critical misjudgments if they become distracted. Not surprisingly, they text more than any other age group and the numbers of young drivers who text is only increasing.

It's a trend that poses a growing danger, so it's important to address this issue now. Parents need to set good example for their children and show them from an early age that it is just not safe to text and/or talk on their phone while driving.

### **Everyone Is Part of the Solution**

"Put It Down" is a broad, public-private partnership of community and health groups, safety advocates, businesses, law enforcement, legislators, public officials, concerned citizens and those who have lost loved ones because of a distracted driver. These partners realize that eliminating distractions while driving will save lives and reduce costs associated with crashes caused by distracted drivers. And because everyone is potentially affected when drivers are distracted, everyone must be part of the solution.

For more information and specific tools for the groups below, please visit the Get Involved section of [www.distraction.gov](http://www.distraction.gov):

- Community Group Materials
- School Materials
- Parent Materials
- Employer Materials
- Law Enforcement Materials

### **Legislation**

As distracted driving has risen to unprecedented levels, State legislatures have begun to take action. In early 2010, 21 States have enacted graduated drivers licensing (GDL) laws. As of May 13, 2010, six States, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands ban hand-held cell phone use for all drivers, and 25 States, the District of Columbia and Guam ban texting by all drivers.

Texting laws are relatively new and have not been thoroughly evaluated. However, considering the rapid emergence of the problem and the growing evidence showing the threat to the safety of all road users, safety advocates and state legislatures are compelled to move forward. Most texting legislation is based on the broad foundation of principles learned from seat belt laws, impaired driving statutes and similar legislative initiatives, while more specific scientific evidence is gathered. To view a sample law that would prohibit texting, please visit <http://distraction.gov/files/dot/texting-law-021910.pdf>.

Since the prevalence of texting is particularly high among teens, legislatures may also choose to include specific consequences under their GDL law for texting violations by novice drivers, such as delayed full licensure.

### **High Visibility Enforcement**

Research for similar campaigns shows that high visibility enforcement works because, with many distracted drivers the fear of a citation and significant fine outweighs their fear of being injured or killed in a crash.

History has also shown for other issues like seat belt use, that when high visibility enforcement programs were implemented to enforce state laws, numbers of seat belt users increased dramatically. With a proven track record of success, we are confident that this strategy will have the same effect on distracted drivers.